

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICEFINAL - NO SIGNATURE  
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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC James Whitcomb Riley Birthplace

AND/OR COMMON

Riley Old Home

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

250 West Main

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Greenfield

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

10th

STATE

Indiana

CODE

018

COUNTY

Hancock

CODE

059

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

## CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

## PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☒ MUSEUM☐ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

City of Greenfield

STREET &amp; NUMBER

South State Street

CITY, TOWN

Greenfield

VICINITY OF

STATE  
Indiana**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder of Hancock County, Indiana

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Court House

CITY, TOWN

Greenfield

STATE  
Indiana**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory

DATE

1972

☐ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation

## 7- DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT  
☒ GOOD  
☐ FAIR  
☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED  
☒ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The James Whitcomb Riley childhood home in Greenfield, Indiana, is largely unaltered since the time of Riley's death in 1916.

Constructed in two sections, the Riley House is a two-story frame Tuscan Villa structure with clapboard siding. The one-story kitchen on the north side gives the structure an "L" shape. The low gabled roof is flanked by flush gable chimneys at the east and west ends. Brackets, projecting eaves, and oblong block are the architectural features which most strongly suggest the Tuscan Villa style. A simple decorated frieze can be found between the brackets. Brackets also support a plain return on the gable ends.

The main facade features three voids on both the first and second stories. The center voids on both stories are entries surrounded with plain moulding. The doorways are flanked by double windows with shutters. Windows in the two-story main block feature four lights over four lights. Windows in the one-story kitchen have doublehung sashes with one light over one light. Windows and entries in the back and side facades are placed irregularly.

A piazza with balustrades on the roof and first floor levels extends across the main facade. Square columns support decorative brackets. There is a back porch east of the one story kitchen.

The first floor interior of the main block includes a hall and stair, two parlors across the front, sitting room, and a dining room. The second story has three large bedrooms and a small playroom. The house also contains a basement.

The Riley House was originally a log cabin constructed on the property about 1847. This structure was the birthplace of James Whitcomb Riley in 1849. Between 1850 and 1853, Reuben A. Riley, the poet's father, built the large main block addition to the original log cabin, which became a kitchen. At this time, clapboard siding was added to the cabin. It is very likely that the piazza and brackets were added later, perhaps about 1870. The house is largely unaltered since the 1870's. "Modern" windows were installed in the kitchen (the cabin) and asphalt shingles were put on the roofs. Electricity was also installed. These changes were made in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

The Riley House preserves the structure in which James Whitcomb Riley spent his childhood and which provided the inspiration for many of his poems which have become a part of the American culture.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

The James Whitcomb Riley Birthplace is significant locally as one of the oldest structures in Greenfield, Indiana, and as an example of the Italianate style of architecture with its low roof and bracketed cornice. Wilbur D. Peat in his Indiana Houses of the Nineteenth Century discusses examples in the state of the Italianate style and states that the Riley House in Greenfield has features of what he calls the Tuscan Villa mode.

As students of American literature know, Riley's fame rests on his poems about children in the rural Midwest of the late nineteenth century. As stated under "Significance" on the National Register nomination, Riley based his writings on his experiences in Greenfield. His childhood residence was a major source of inspiration for his work. The back porch east of the one story kitchen is where Little Orphan Annie "shoo-ed the chickens off." Other features of the house are noted in the story of Little Orphan Annie. "They seeked him in the rafter room and cubby hole and press, they seeked him up the chimney flue and everywhere I guess. But all they ever found was just his pants and roundabout. In the Goblins al get you if you don't watch out."

As is stated on continuation sheet page 2 for item 8, the Riley House preserves the structure that was the setting for Little Orphan Annie and the Raggedy Man which are part of the American culture. For this reason the house is significant in the development of American literature.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

Mitchell, Minnie Belle. Greenfield, the Home of Riley. n.p., c. 1937.

Williams, D. J. Hancock County Kaleidoscope. Greenfield:  
Mitchell Fleming Printing Company, 1976.

Russo, Anthony J. and Dorothy R. Bibliography of James Whitcomb Riley.  
Bobbs-Merill Company, Inc; Indianapolis, 1944.

Nolan, Jeanette Covert, James Whitcomb Riley, Hoosier Poet,  
New York: Montauk Book Manufacturing Co., Inc., 1941.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1847, 1849, 1853

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Reuben A. Riley

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Although the Riley Birthplace is notable as an example of Tuscan Villa architecture, its significance is established by its association with James Whitcomb Riley.

On December 12, 1846, Reuben A. Riley purchased several lots on Main Street and erected a log cabin, probably in 1847. It was in this structure that James Whitcomb Riley was born on October 7, 1849. Reuben Riley was a lawyer who served the community as a school examiner, legislative representative, and a judge. Although the elder Riley's occupation was in law, he was a talented woodworker and probably did much of the work when the two-story frame block was added to his log cabin during the years from 1850 to 1853. Riley served as a Captain of a company of Indiana Volunteers for three years during the Civil War. His law practice suffered during his absence, and debts may have forced him to sell his Main Street house in 1864 to Moses Hamilton. The Rileys moved in with relatives in the vicinity.

As a youth, James Whitcomb Riley worked at a number of occupations, including painting signs and houses, selling bibles, and working in a medicine show. Riley's writing career had a rocky start when he lasted only a few months as editor of the Greenfield paper. He first attracted notice while he worked on the Anderson Democrat in 1877. From 1887 to 1885 he worked on the Indianapolis Journal and achieved success with poems such as "When the Frost is on the Punkin" printed under the pseudonym of Benj. F. Johnson. Riley's first book, The Old Swimmin' Hole and 'Leven More Poems, was printed only after a friend on the paper financed the venture. The public response was sufficient to ensure future financial support.

Known as the "Hoosier Poet", Riley based his poems on his childhood experiences in Greenfield. He was one of the "local color" writers which were popular in America in the late 1800's. Some of Riley's other works include Afterwhiles, Rhymes of Childhood, Poems Here at Home, and Riley Child Rhymes. Among other characters, he gave American culture Little Orphan Annie, the Raggedy Man, and Old Aunt Mary.

In 1911, Indiana schools held a Riley Day to honor the poet. The observance spread until 1915 when Riley Day was a national event.

One of Riley's first acts after achieving financial success was to purchase his childhood home in 1893 from Moses Hamilton. He leased the structure to various tenants until 1912 when it was turned over to his sister-in-law, Julia Riley. She retained the house after Riley's death in 1916. The City of Greenfield purchased the house from her in 1935. Since that time, it has been serving as a museum.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Peat, Wilbur D. Indiana Houses of the Nineteenth Century. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1962.

Richman, George J. History of Hancock County, Indiana. Indianapolis: Federal Publishing Company, Inc., 1916.

(con't)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	6
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6	0	5	0	4	0
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4	4	0	4	4	2	0
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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B 

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 

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D 

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Thomas E. Q. Williams, President, Riley Old Home Society, Inc.

ORGANIZATION

DATE

June 23, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

462-7758

CITY OR TOWN

Greenfield

STATE

Indiana

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE     

LOCAL     

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

June 21, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE